DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 412 989 IR 056 722

AUTHOR Boos, Jo Ellen
TITLE A Children's Materials Availability Study at the Bellevue Public Library.
PUB DATE 1996-11-00
NOTE 32p.; Master's Research Paper, Kent State University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Children; *Early Adolescents; Evaluation Methods; Library Collections; Library Research; *Library Services; *Library Surveys; Public Libraries; *Use Studies; *User Needs (Information); User Satisfaction (Information)
IDENTIFIERS Ohio; *Output Measurements

ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been a push for libraries to develop and use systematic measures to determine the effectiveness of library service. Materials availability, or fill rate, is one of many output measures used in libraries. This technique measures the degree to which library customers are able to acquire the materials they want during their visits to the library; it serves as an indicator of how well the library's collection is meeting its users' needs. This paper describes a study of children's materials availability at the Bellevue Public Library (Ohio). Questionnaires were distributed to patrons--children and adults acting on behalf of children--in the library over a period of one week, with an end result of 197 usable questionnaires. Searches for specific authors, titles, and subjects had a fill rate of 79%. The browsing fill rate was 76%. The homework fill rate was 84%. The overall children's fill rate, including specific searches and browsing, was 77%. Data gathered from the study were useful for analyzing and forming objectives for collection development, bibliographic instruction, and customer service. This study provides a foundation from which to make comparisons in the future. Repeating the study each year will provide more information about the effects of budget changes and automation on search processes. The survey cover letter, questionnaire, and survey log are appended. (Contains 19 references.) (SWC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

IR

ED 412 989

A CHILDREN'S MATERIALS AVAILABILITY STUDY AT THE BELLEVUE PUBLIC LIBRARY

A Master's Research paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Jo Ellen Boos

November, 1996

IR056782

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Du Mont

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Jo Ellen Boos
Master's Research Paper - Abstract
November, 1996
Dr. Lois Buttlar, Advisor

ABSTRACT

An operating levy, the first for the Bellevue Public Library, passed in the fall of 1995. It began providing funds for badly needed collection development. In the fall of 1996, the Library began the final phase of automating its circulation system and catalog. These factors suggested that it would be an opportune time to begin the use of output measures. Output measures would create data from which to assess productivity in quantifiable terms and to set standards from which to make comparisons over time.

The measure chosen to put into place first was a children's materials availability study, which measures fill rate. Children's fill rate is the percentage of searches for library materials by children and adults acting on behalf of children that are successful.

Data gathered would be used to help determine goals for collection development, bibliographic instruction, and customer service.

Of the 226 surveys distributed, 197 were returned with usable information. Searches for specific authors, titles, and subjects had a fill rate of 79%. The browsing fill rate was 76%. The homework fill rate was 84%. The overall children's fill rate, which includes both successful searches for specific items and for browsing, was 77%. This figure was found to be satisfactory, but steps for improvement have been planned.

Master's Research Paper by

Jo Ellen Boos

B.S., Bowling Green State University, 1977

M.L.S., Kent State University, 1996

Approved by

Advisor Lois Buttlar Date 11-13-96

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES iv

I. INTRODUCTION 1

Purpose of the Study 2
Definition of Terms 3
Limitations of the Study 4

II. LITERATURE 5

III. METHODOLOGY 10

IV. ANALYSIS OF DATA 12

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION 19

APPENDIX A: COVER LETTER 21

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE 22

APPENDIX C: SURVEY LOG 23

REFERENCE LIST 24

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. Distribution of Fill Rates by Category	13
2. Distribution of Fill Rate for School-Related Searches	15
3. Distribution of Responses by Age	17

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Librarians have long kept statistics related to circulation and inventory. It has only been in recent years that there has been a push toward the development and use of systematic measures to determine effectiveness of library service. Further, it wasn't until the early 1990s that the American Library Association specifically addressed "quantifying and measuring the results, or outputs, of public library service to children" (Walter 1992, 1).

Youth services librarians have been slow to adopt systematic planning and evaluation procedures (Fitzgibbons 1990). Traditionally, children's librarians are thought of as storytellers and people who help children select and check out books. Although programming and reference skills are still of great importance, today's children's librarians must also be skilled managers. Management includes determining goals, developing policies, and evaluating services. Children's librarians who do not accept these additional responsibilities relinquish their ability to fully serve as children's advocates, particularly in the area of library service (Children's Services Division 1995).

Materials availability, or fill rate, is one of many recommended output measures. This technique measures the degree of success to which library customers are able to acquire the materials they want during their visits to the library. It serves as an indicator of how well the library's collection is meeting the needs of its users (Walter 1992).

It has been argued that materials availability studies measure customers' abilities in locating materials and are not strict measures of library performance (D'Elia 1985). This does not negate the value of the output measure. Several factors may contribute to customers' success, including quality of the collection, children's abilities to locate materials, and a friendly atmosphere that allows customers to feel comfortable about asking for assistance. Analyzing the data in a materials availability study may help researchers begin to determine whether improvements need to be made in the collection, in bibliographic instruction, and in customer service.

Purpose of the Study

The Bellevue Public Library is in a transition period. A new director with a strong philosophy of customer service began employment a year ago. An operating levy, the first for the Library, passed last fall. It is providing funds for badly needed collection development. Finally, the library is in the process of automating its circulation system and catalog.

These factors suggested that this would be an opportune time to begin the

use of output measures. The goal was to gather data that would be useful for analyzing the collection, developing online bibliographic instruction, and determining strengths and weaknesses in customer service. A children's materials availability study was selected as the output measure to put into place first. This would give the staff experience in conducting surveys and lay the foundation for further investigations using evaluative procedures.

Definition of Terms

Children's Materials Availability - the degree to which children and their caregivers are able to find the materials they want in the library.

Children's Fill Rate - the percentage of searches for library materials by children and adults acting on behalf of children that are successful. This rate measures the success users have in finding materials in all areas of the library, not just children's materials.

Homework Fill Rate - proportion of searches for information and/or library materials to assist with homework that are successful.

Children - for the purpose of this study, will be people ages 14 and under.

Adults acting on Behalf of Children - parents, teachers, babysitters, child care providers, and other adults who are seeking library materials for use with or by children.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to children's services at the Bellevue Public Library. Findings are not necessarily generalizable to other libraries.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The American Library Association promoted the use of evaluation tools in the early 1980s with the publication of Output Measures for Public Libraries (Zweizig and Rodger 1982). It wasn't until a companion volume, Output Measures for Public Library Service to Children, was published in 1992 that the American Library Association specifically addressed the need for and outlined procedures for evaluating children's library services (Walter 1992).

Shirley Fitzgibbons stresses the importance of differentiating children as a special category of users when setting measurement techniques into place. The information needs of today's youth are greater than ever. Meeting those needs effectively will have an impact on the future of the nation. The use of evaluative procedures helps librarians determine whether they are meeting those needs in terms of staffing, space, hours, and materials. The public library plays a vital role as a youth serving agency, especially in the areas of literacy and lifelong learning. It must hold itself accountable through the use of systematic planning and evaluation (Fitzgibbons 1990).

The Wisconsin pilot study also stressed the importance of measuring children's services separately. Although any given public library is a single institution, it offers a variety of services to meet the needs of many different types of clients. The developmental levels of children must be taken into account when offering services and evaluating them. In the Wisconsin study output measures are defined as standardized indicators of service that are stated in ratios. This allows for comparisons to other libraries, or to the same library over time. It is important to note that the numbers are not to be interpreted as values or measures of worth, but as indicators of the direction in which service is moving (Zweizig, Braune and Waity 1989).

Adele Fasick addresses the need for children's librarians to adopt quantitative measurements appropriate to children's services and not just borrowed from other sources. Although there is truth in the argument that much of youth services cannot be measured in quantitative terms, in this time of shrinking budgets it is imperative that every effort be made to justify the program (Fasick 1990).

One of the issues that makes the use of quantitative measures difficult in children's services is the number and variety of goals that are held. Preparing preschoolers for school, offering cultural experiences, providing supplementary materials for school projects, providing enrichment materials and programs, helping children develop a love of reading, and promoting lifelong learning are just a few. It seems a difficult task to translate objectives like these into statistics

(Fasick 1990).

Mary Chelton discusses other factors that contribute to the resistance of children's librarians to adopt output measures. Children's librarians are usually in entry level positions and have less authority to carry out evaluations or make corresponding policy changes. Other problems include the relative isolation of most children's services areas, children's developmental levels, and seasonal variations. Further, children's librarians who may be sensitive about the important work they do for low pay and little status may be resistant to setting themselves up to be scrutinized. Chelton emphasized that it is the importance of the work that makes it a necessity to develop a positive attitude towards self-study (Chelton 1987).

It has been suggested by several sources that a combination of qualitative and quantitative evaluation is essential for providing the best assessment of services. Keeping a written log of observations plus comments from youth and parents provides descriptive information that supplements data from output measures.

Materials availability is one of the output measures outlined in the American Library Association manuals. It serves primarily as an indicator of how well a library collection is meeting the needs of its users. The data is collected by conducting surveys of library customers. Children's fill rate and homework fill rate are variants of materials availability measures (Walter 1992).

George D'Elia has questioned the validity of fill rate data when surveys are used. He argues that the fill rate is not an output measure in the strictest sense of the word, because it measures more than library performance, where library performance is whether an item is available on the shelf at the time it is needed. Other variables confound the data, including the patron's ability to locate the item, staff helpfulness, and the layout of the collection (D'Elia 1985, 1988a, 1988b).

Diana Young adds that another factor that may affect the fill rate is the condition of the collection. Even when the right titles and subjects are available, if the books are dirty, worn, or out-of-date the patron might decide to leave them behind (Young 1990).

Craighton Hippenhammer discusses the need for the researcher to be wary of high fill rates in children's materials availability studies, as the figures may be inflated by the children's desire to please adults and give the answers they believe the adults want to hear (Hippenhammer 1990).

Other considerations are traffic patterns, height of shelving, location of information desks, and signage (Eaton 1991).

Nancy Van House defends materials availability studies and argues their usefulness for management purposes. Availability measures whether patrons are able to acquire the items needed. Fill rates are determined by the library and the user in complex ways. When analyzing the rates the researcher must keep in mind all of the possible variables. The data will be useful, especially when comparing a

library to itself over time. As with all measures, the investigator must understand the meaning and limits of the data. As such, materials availability studies are valid measures of user success in a library (Van House 1988a, 1988b).

Materials availability studies in several libraries have provided useful information. Researchers at the Mikkelsen Library found the fill rates to be acceptable, but used the data to fill in gaps in the collection where information was not found. They also determined that there was a positive correlation between high fill rates and their bibliographic instruction program (Thompson 1987).

Use of periodical fill rate data led to the development of a resource sharing network that dramatically increased the number of available resources for use by students in Skagit County, Washington (Jones 1991).

A concern about service to middle schoolers at Bethlehem Area Public Library prompted the use of fill rates to identify weaknesses in service and the collection. Analysis of the data enabled librarians to target the interests and needs of their middle school clients and increase circulation by five times the previous amount (Wilson 1990).

In her materials availability study, Marilyn Greenberg found that offering interlibrary loan to students significantly improved availability of materials. As long as the response time is reasonable, patrons don't care where the item comes from as long as they are able to obtain it. In addition, variable loan periods may improve fill rates (Greenberg 1986).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A children's availability materials availability survey was scheduled for the week of October 7 at the Bellevue Public Library (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was taken from Walter's Output Measures for Public Library Service to Children with one additional question, "Did you ask a librarian for help?" (see Appendix B). The survey was conducted throughout the week during regular business hours. All children, ages 14 and under, as well as adults acting on behalf of children, ages 14 and under were targeted.

A staff meeting was held to explain the purpose of the survey and the procedures. Staff members were instructed to greet potential participants and explain that the library was conducting a survey to see if customers find what they are looking for while using the library.

Patrons were given brief instructions for filling out the survey and the place for indicating other reasons for using the library, such as copier, restrooms, computer, were pointed out. Staff offered assistance, particularly to children who needed help reading and filling out the forms. Collection boxes were placed at several locations throughout the library, including both circulation desks. Pencils

were provided.

For patrons who indicated a preference not to participate, a statement of "Thank you, anyway" was made, and the forms were marked "Refused" and placed in the collection box by the staff member.

Signs announcing that a survey was underway were posted at the entrance, the circulation desks, and other strategic locations.

Data was recorded using Walter's survey log and summary form (Walter 1992). A children's fill rate and a homework fill rate were tabulated.

The data, including comments, was analyzed for information to help determine goals for collection development, customer service and bibliographic instruction.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Of the 226 questionnaires distributed over the week long period, 197 were usable (87%). The fill rates were determined by dividing the number of items found by the number of items sought. Searches for specific items had a fill rate of 79%. The browsing fill rate was lower, at 76%. The children's fill rate, which includes both specific searches and browsing, was 77%. The fill rates were found to be acceptable, with users finding adequate materials three times out of four. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Distribution of Fill Rates by Category.

Category	Fill Rate	f	%
Title/subject/ authors sought		165	
Title/subject/ authors found		130	
	Title/subject/authors		79
Number of browsers		165	
Number of browsers finding something		125	
	Browsing		76

After further analysis of the surveys, it was determined that the lower browsing fill rate may have been due in part to the way the browsing question was stated. Some of the "No" answers may have been in response to whether the users had browsed at all, rather than whether they had browsed and found something of interest.

In future studies the compound question pertaining to browsing will be broken into two distinct parts: "Did you browse?" and "Did you find anything interesting?"

Homework fill rate represents the number of successful searches for school-related items. This measurement was particularly useful because the Bellevue Public Library includes as part of its mission the support of formal education. It is recognized that this rate could vary from week to week during the school year depending upon changing assignments and the number of students searching for similar items.

The homework fill rate was the highest, at 84%. This would indicate that most school-related searches are successful. (See Table 2).

Table 2

Distribution of Fill Rate for School-Related Searches.

Category	Fill Rate	f	%
Title/subject/ authors sought for school		83	
Title/subject/ authors sought for school and found		70	
	Homework		84

During the week of the survey, the subject area that was sought most often for school-related purposes, was American Indian tribes. For recreational reading, R.L. Stine's "Goosebumps" series, (Scholastic), was mentioned most often. In both cases, the fill rate was excellent.

Sixty respondents indicated that they had asked a librarian for help. Another 35 respondents wrote positive comments about the friendly atmosphere and the courteous, helpful service provided by library staff. There were no negative comments about service.

Searches for specific authors, titles, and subjects were conducted successfully without the help of librarians by 67 users. It was concluded that the Library's annual program of onsite bibliographic instruction in cooperation with the Bellevue City Schools has enabled young patrons to become more skilled and self-sufficient in their use of the Library.

Adults searching on behalf of children returned 61 questionnaires. That figure represents 31% of the total number of responses. Of those 61 adults, 19 were searching for materials for more than one child.

The nine and ten year olds returned 49 surveys. This represents the largest category by age for children responding on their own. (See Table 3.)

Table 3

Distribution of Responses by Age

Age	f	%
Adults answering for children	61	31
7 & 8 year olds	22	11
9 & 10 year olds	49	25
11 & 12 year olds	39	20
13 & 14 year olds	26	13
Total responses	197	

Many respondents made use of the space provided on the questionnaire for comments. Regarding customer service, statements included "Staff go above and beyond to do their job," "The ladies are very helpful and kind to my kids," and "Everyone is always very friendly."

Other respondents praised programs and services. Comments included "My son loves getting his hand stamped," "terrific programs," "I like the computer and the Geo Safari," and "I like the toys and books."

A few users offered suggestions such as "More Garfield books, please," and "You need more comics." Action has been taken to satisfy these requests.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The children's materials availability study was worthwhile both in terms of public relations and the information it provided.

Having library staff members greet each user personally while distributing the surveys sent a positive message about their concern for quality service. Users responded positively about having the opportunity to express their needs.

Data gathered was useful for analyzing and forming objectives for collection development, bibliographic instruction, and customer service.

In an effort to improve the browsing fill rate, two goals have been set. One is to increase the number of displays in the Children's Room and Young Adult Department. The second is to purchase more paperbacks, including current classics and popular series titles.

The fill rate figures and specific information about subject/title/author searches confirmed what was suspected. Young users have already benefited from the additional funds being provided by the operating levy. Also, participation in a standing order plan has increased the success rate for acquiring popular paperback series titles. The standing order plan will be expanded.

Bibliographic instruction will continue, with appropriate changes in lesson plans as the transition from card catalog to online catalog is completed. In addition, 'Computer Camp' workshops will be offered after school and during summer break to allow young patrons to sharpen their searching skills.

High quality customer service and the importance of maintaining a friendly atmosphere will continue to be emphasized in staff training and development.

This children's materials availability study provided a foundation from which to make comparisons in the future. The survey will be repeated in the summer of 1997 to take into account the seasonal nature of children's library services. Repeating the study each year will provide more information about the effects of budget changes and automation on search success.

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER

School of Library and Information Science
(216) 672-2782
Fax 216-672-7965

Kent STATE UNIVERSITY

P. O. Box 5190, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001

Re: A Children's Materials Availability Study
at the Bellevue Public Library

October 7, 1996

Dear Library Customer:

I am a graduate student in the School of Library and Information Science at Kent State University. As part of my classwork, I am studying which books and other items children look for at the library. The questionnaire being passed out today is part of my research.

It is anonymous and confidential. You don't have to sign your name.

If you choose to fill out the survey, your answers will help the library serve you better. There is no penalty of any kind if you should choose not to participate or if you start the survey and decide not to finish it.

If you have any questions about this project call Dr. Lois Buttlar, my research advisor, at 330-672-2782. For questions about research in general at Kent State University, call Dr. M. Thomas Jones at 330-672-2851.

Thank you for your help! Please place the questionnaire in the box at the desk.

Sincerely,

Jo Ellen Boos

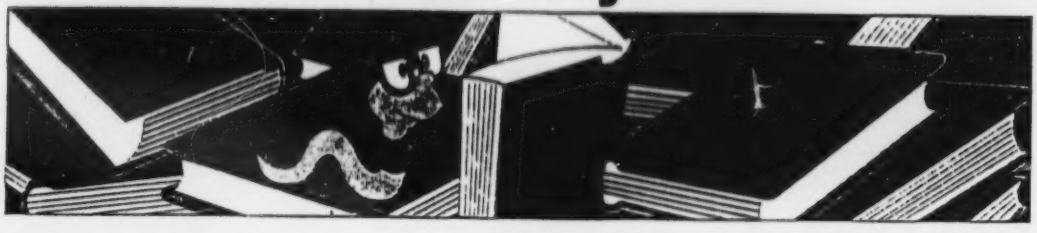
Jo Ellen Boos
Graduate Student

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

Bellevue Public Library Survey



1. How old are you? _____

   (If you are an adult looking for materials for a child, put down the child's age, not your own)

2. Were you looking for anything special? YES NO

   Please tell us what you were looking for:

   a._____

   Did you find it? YES NO Was it for school? YES NO

   b._____

   Did you find it? YES NO Was it for school? YES NO

   c._____

   Did you find it? YES NO Was it for school? YES NO

3. Did you ask the librarian for help? YES NO

4. If you were just browsing and not looking for anything special, did you find anything interesting? YES NO

5. Did you come to the library for some completely different reason, such as attending a program or using the restroom? YES NO

6. Is there anything else you want to tell us about the library? You may write on the back of this page if you want to.

28

Thank you for answering our questions.
Please leave this form with the librarian today.

APPENDIX C

SURVEY LOG

Children's Library Survey Log

	(1) Title, subject, author				(2) Browsing		(3) Other		(4) Help
	(a) Sought for school		(b) Not for school		(a) Browsers	(b) Found something	(a) Other	(b) Refused, blank, or missing	
Form Number	(c) Found	(d) Not found	(e) Found	(f) Not found					
TOTAL									
	School items found	School items not found	Nonschool items found	Nonschool items not found	Number of browsers	Browsers finding something	Other	Not usable	Help

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

WORKS CITED

Chelton, Mary K. 1990. Evaluation of children's services. In Evaluation strategies and techniques for public library children's services: a sourcebook, ed. Jane Robbins, Holly Willet, Mary Jane Wiseman and Douglas L. Zweizig, 49-78. Madison, WI: School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Children's Services Division. 1995. Youth services handbook. Columbus, OH: Ohio Library Council.

D'Elia, George. 1985. Materials availability fill rates - useful measures of library performance? Public Libraries 24 (Fall):106-110.

_____. 1988a. Materials availability fill rates: additional data addressing the question of the usefulness of the measures. Public Libraries 27 (Spring):15-23.

_____. 1988b. A response to Van House. Public Libraries 27 (Spring):28-31.

Eaton, Gale E. 1991. Wayfinding in the library: book searches and route uncertainty. RQ 30 (Summer):519-27.

Fasick, Adele M. 1990. Research and measurement in library services to children. In Evaluation strategies and techniques for public library children's services: a sourcebook, ed. Jane Robbins, Holly Willet, Mary Jane Wiseman and Douglas L. Zweizig, 19-30. Madison, WI: School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Fitzgibbons, Shirley Grinnell. 1990. Accountability of library services for youth: a planning measurement, and evaluation model. In Library performance, accountability, and responsiveness: essays in honor of Ernest R. De Prospo, ed. Charles C. Curran and F. William Summers, 65-83. Norwood, NJ:Ablex.

Greenberg, Marilyn W. 1986. Measuring the availability of library materials. School Library Media Quarterly 14 (Spring):151-153.

Hippenhammer, Craighton. 1990. Managing children's library collections through objective data. In Evaluation strategies and techniques for public library children's services: a sourcebook, ed. Jane Robbins, Holly Willet, Mary Jane Wiseman and Douglas L. Zweizig, 223-230. Madison, WI: School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Jones, Sally L. 1991. Just the FAX for high school students. School Library Journal 37 (January):42.

Thompson, Ronnelle K. H. 1987. How are we doing? Using a materials availability study in an academic library. In Libraries and the literacy challenge, the frontier of the 90s: proceedings of the Mountain Plains Library Association Academic Library Section Research Forum, ed. V. Sue Hatfield, 17-30. Emporia, KS: Emporia State University Press.

Van House, Nancy. 1988a. In defense of fill rates. Public Libraries 27 (Spring):25-27.

_____. 1988b. A response to D'Elia. Public Libraries 27 (Spring):32.

Walter, Virginia A. 1992. Output measures for public library service to children: a manual of standardized procedures . Chicago: American Library Association.

Wilson, Cynthia M. 1990. Output measures identify problems and solutions for middle schoolers. Public Libraries 29 (January/February):19-22.

Young, Diana. 1990. Evaluating children's services. In Evaluation strategies and techniques for public library children's services: a sourcebook. ed. Jane Robbins, Holly Willet, Mary Jane Wiseman and Douglas L. Zweizig, 31-36. Madison, WI: School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Zweizig, Douglas, and Eleanor Jo Rodger. 1982. Output measures for public libraries: a manual of standardized procedures. Chicago: American Library Association.

Zweizig, Douglas, Joan A. Braune and Gloria A. Waity. 1989. Output measures for children's services in Wisconsin public libraries. Madison, WI: School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison.